

I

imaginary beings; three characters walk into a

OBJ

A One Act Play.

Imaginary beings: three characters walk into a b

by

Nigel Helyer

Published in digital form 2024. SonicObjects; Sonic Architecture.
Copyright © Nigel Helyer 2023.

62 Macgibbon Parade, Old Erowal Bay, NSW 2540, Australia.

Email: sonique1@icloud.com

Phone: +61(0)4 19 49 34 95

URL: <http://www.sonicobjects.com>

ISBN: 978-0-9872463-8-7

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above,
publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a database and re-
transmitted in any form or any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying
otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the owner of copyright
and the original publisher.



P

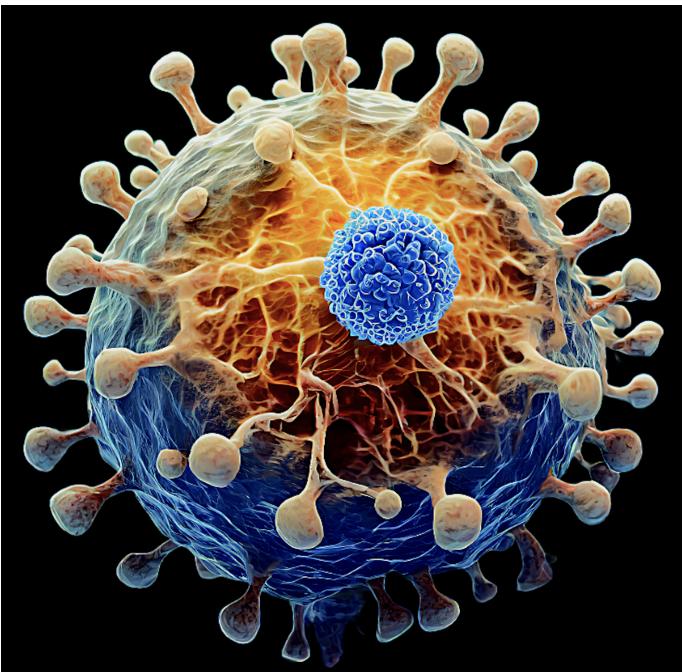
relude.

Three characters walk into a bar, a Virus, a Human and Santa Claus. The bar tender refuses to serve the Human and Santa Claus on the basis that he regards them as chimera¹, but happily serves the Virus three beakers of industrial alcohol, which the Virus generously shares with his two colleagues.

As the bar is otherwise empty, the bar tender joins them at the bar. A lively discussion ensues in the form of a classical exposition, an argumentative discourse designed to test the identity, integrity and sovereignty of each drinker.

This hypothetical scenario seeks to analyse the biological implications of the bar tender's actions, to explore the social and historical constructions that define life, and to trace the genetic leakages and seepages that take place between radically different organisms.

¹ chimera, in genetics, an organism or tissue that contains at least two different sets of genetic material, originating from the fusion of as many different zygotes (fertilised eggs). The term chimera is derived from the Chimera of Greek mythology, a fire-breathing monster that was part lion, part goat, and part serpent. Chimeras are distinguished from mosaics, organisms that contain genetically different cells that originated from a single zygote, and from hybrids, organisms containing genetically different sets of cells originating from a cross of two different species. Included among the different types of animal chimeras are disperjic and twin chimeras, microchimeras, and parthenogenetic chimeras. <https://www.britannica.com/science/chimera-genetics>



particular the incorporation of exogenous genetic material of the virus² —the Virus being confident that at least 8% of the Human genome to is composed of the DNA of ancient retroviruses that have been passed through the germ cells (eggs and sperm) of the Human species over the course of years.

The scientist might well ask the Virus if it is a living or non-living entity; it cannot reproduce independently, only within the cell of a host. In the same manner the Virus might also turn his attention to the extremely palpable figure of Santa Claus and ask the same question. Santa Claus would have to respond that despite the many humans who believe in his authentic identity³, his existence is only reproduced in the minds of the humans propelled with the assistance of entities such as the Coca-Cola Corporation of America⁴. In his defence Santa might propose that, if this is the case, he is just as real, in fact even more real, than the Virus because of the profound effect that he has over human behaviour, belief systems, relationships—after all, he can cite the fact that more people believe in the reality of Santa Claus than the reality of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

In a nutshell the paper intertwines biological and genetic ‘realities’ with constructs of the human imaginary, in an attempt to tease out the complex outlines of existence, identity, and belief systems.

² Retroviruses comprise over 8% of the human genome (1, 2). Human endogenous viruses exist as DNA remnants of infections that occurred in germ lineage cells of our ancestors. The DNA is mutated, often including various large disruptions, but some components are still functional.

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1603569113>

³ Saint Nicholas was a 4th-century Greek Christian bishop of Myra in the region of Lycia, Roman Empire, (Turkey). Nicholas was known for his generous gifts to the poor, in particular to the impoverished daughters of a pious Christian with dowries so that they would not have to become prostitutes.

⁴ Contemporary images of a rotund bearded man dressed in red (with white trimmings) first appearing in the early 20th century, appearing on several covers of Puck magazine. Shortly thereafter, the figure became associated with Christmas.

transformation and is associated with beverages - initially as a red and white Santa Beverages mineral water in 1915 and then in advertisements for its ginger ale in 1929 artist Haddon Sundblom, depicted Santa for The Coca-Cola Company's Christmas ad suite Coca-Cola's competitor ,Pepsi-Cola used similar Santa Claus paintings in its ads in the 1940s and 1950s.

ACT I SCENE 1

Scene: The Bar L.U.C.A.

Somewhere in a utopian European democracy. The three characters walk to the Bar L.U.C.A, where the painted sign above the entrance reads:

We serve pure spirit to the biologically pure.

CHARACTER #1: CARLOS.

Carlos the Bartender. Young, affable and efficient. He also controls the narrative.

CHARACTER #2: EVE.

Eve, a human, identified as female, a biologist; smart, analytical, talking—but inclusive in her manner.

CHARACTER #3: SANTA CLAUS.

Santa Claus, representing his many roles and traditions.

CHARACTER #4: VIRA, a VIRUS

Vira, an example of the most prolific of all life-forms and perhaps the most representative of the oldest life form (certainly the oldest in the room).

Apologia:

No part of this text was created or assisted by AI Chat-bots. No humans were harmed in this production.

Direction—The bartender greets them, but simultaneously gives you a scan.

CARLOS:

Good evening friends and welcome, but before I can serve you I must follow EU laws to check your biometrics with a retinal scan

Direction—Carlos whips out an electronic iris reader, and then forward to squint into the device.

I trust this will not inconvenience you—it is part of the new Immigration and Border Protection policy.

EVE:

That sounds horribly familiar!

CARLOS:

They say it's for the common good.

EVE:

That sounds even more familiar!

Direction—When Carlos has scanned each of the visitors he turns to Eve.

CARLOS:

Vira; I'm happy to serve you, but I'm afraid that your friend in the black leather jacket is out of the question, her DNA is completely different from anything I've ever seen. It's difficult to determine what in fact it is!

And the other one with the red outfit and beard, well frankly she's not made of cellular life or DNA whatsoever—it would seem to be a combination of memes and historical context. It does however have a metabolism highly adapted to profound cold—a new species of extremophile.

CARLOS:

But Listen—As it is a quiet night and I don't want to spoil your evening, I'm happy to serve you—and then you can just pass the drinks to your other companions.

VIRA:

Good, well make that, a double shot of methyl alcohol for me and a double of ethanol for my friends, thanks.

Direction—The three sit at the table—and as the bar is virtually a bartender, pours himself, a drink and joins the three in conversation.

SANTA CLAUS:

Direction—Santa Claus turns to the bartender with a smile.

So you must be Luca young man?

CARLOS:

Direction—Carlos returns his smile, but shakes his head.

No my name is Carlos, but I am a **L.U.C.A.**

SANTA CLAUS:

Direction—Santa Claus frowns quizzically.

CARLOS:

L.U.C.A. is the last universal common ancestor to all living beings, cousin to everyone, except to you perhaps! You may recall in the “Origin of Species.”

Therefore, I should infer from analogy, that probably all the organic beings which have ever lived on earth have descended from one primordial being whose structure has been preserved by inheritance, in almost the same condition as it first breathed.

Well—I’m one of them!

EVE:

I simply love the last sentence of his book:

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several forms having been originally breathed into a few forms—on

Direction—Eve turning to Santa.

But he has a point there Santa, no DNA, no deal. Our friend here, regards you as a figment of the collective imagination
SANTA CLAUS:

Direction—Santa Claus huffs and puffs.

Well I may have a complicated history, but as you know, I am anyone here. I am a replicating entity just like you Eve—It's well—**do it**—like you!

And like you Vira, I have hosts—my existence is reproduced young humans—with a small nudge from their parents, toys and not to forget the Coca Cola Corporation of America. But course, an uninvited guest—and one with very poor domestic understand!

VIRA:

But Santa that means you are an empty sign, a simple vehicle independent agency and no intentionality.

SANTA CLAUS:

In my defence I would propose that I am just as real—in fact than the average Virus—just think about the profound effects human behaviour, belief systems and relationships—after all more people believe in me than the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and me of being fake-news.

As you know I have a long and complicated cultural history. In century I was known as Saint Nicholas, the Greek Christian saint. But even before that at home in the Northlands I was the leader of the Yule Hunt each Yuletide—then my nickname was Odin. Actually I am Sinter-Klauss, too hard for Americans to say apparently. And just about everyone knows me, and everyone loves me—so proof enough. And just because no-one vaccinates against Santa.

VIRA:

Ugh!—Vaccines are a pain in the Butt!

Direction—Vira turns to address Eve.

VIRA:

Eve, your crew are always trying to put me out of business,
little success.

EVE:

Well with your name why wouldn't we.

You forget your Latin, *Virus*, a poison; or a slimy liquid!

Direction—Vira shrugs and turns to Santa Claus.

VIRA:

And you Santa are the new kid on the block in more than one sense.
with the 4th Century is just a moment ago if you consider our common ancestor
here—Carlos; how old are you exactly?

Carlos:

Direction—Carlos smiling.

It's my Four-Billionth birthday next month—it's going to be a big one.
don't you all come along!

VIRA:

Almost as old as me—I thought I recognised you, we must have crossed paths over the years, maybe you played host to me once or twice.

Direction—Vira turning back to Santa Claus.

Santa—secondly I admit that genes maybe selfish. Mea Culpa, I am a tiny DNA with a nice protein and lipid overcoat—I really only have one job and that is to reproduce myself, and in that I am similar to you. And I admit that you and I both require a host to replicate ourselves before—you contain no essential code or script, a meme is not a living thing.

degenerate sign—whose only merit is the ability to be transmitted, a delivery-man who doesn't know what's in the

SANTA CLAUS:

Well all I can do is to quote T.H. Huxley who in 1880 said:
The struggle for existence holds as much in the intellectual, as in
A theory of species of thinking, and its right to exist, is coextensive
resisting extinction by its rivals.

Vira, try and see it this way, you function blindly in this world of sentience—your only real plan is to continue to exist and evolve through random mutation.

Eve:

Well said Santa—Vira, in my profession we describe you as ***Edge of Life***—in a limbo state, not quite inanimate, but also you can reproduce, mutate and evolve, but not independently of metabolism—your propagate by hijacking the metabolism of another organism.

VIRA:

Instead of being on the ***Edge of Life*** I consider that I ***Live on the Edge*** of life! As a result of being small I don't take up ***Too Much Space!***

Although in terms of the biosphere, we Viruses actually take up a greater amount of space, more than the rest of you put together. You might say that we are the ***First Nations*** of the Earth!

Your profession Eve, in fact your species, might benefit from our gazing—as it would appear that the average human DNA contains a significant amount of retroviruses from ancient viral infections.

And more—your bodies are home to 30 trillion human cells, plus another 39 trillion bacterial cells—not to mention all of those Archaea.

All considered you are about 43% human—and 57% us! That's the DNA fingerprint of L.U.C.A. You are, as Carlos discovered,
Mestito—I am the only thoroughbred here!

Ironically this is the reason that your species is so Xenophobic with Race and Ethnicity. It's in your DNA, so to speak!

EVE:

I resent that, you are talking to the most highly evolved species.

VIRA:

Really, one that shares 60% of its DNA with a Banana! and 99.9% with a fly; or perhaps you would prefer 84% shared with a Dog—or 95% with a Cow, and 98.8% with the Great Apes! Even your Neanderthal cousin had more brain power than you—so what's all the fuss about?

SANTA CLAUS:

Whoa Vira; let us not forget our sense of decorum and good breeding. You are a member of the species that you are possibly one of—or *the* original inhabitant of Earth. Let me let live my friend—after all you need Eve, but I am not sure she needs you! And she, of course, can claim that she is both Sane and Insane—qualities that elude you!

Vira, I counsel you to avoid the superficial distinction that you make between biological units of information, and function in an entirely different way. Genes are biological units of information, and memes are cultural units of information. To me they are equally important and equivalent in terms of their capacity to reproduce and evolve, and to affect the human population.

This distinction simply reinforces a false nature/nurture dichotomy, and it also underestimates the *kinetic* effects of memes. Memes do not just pass from person to person, or between teenagers on social media; they are biochemically active in the human brains that they inhabit. Memes affect human behavior in subtle ways—and can change the course of history.

Religion is a case in point—where memes are a political force that can harden into dogma, evolving into life changing and life terminating beliefs.

bigotry and conflict.

Direction—Vira addressing Santa Claus.

VIRA.

So my friend you are now claiming a functional role in biology that's pretty rich for an advertising campaign poster-boy! Let's add a pinch of salt and get back to Sentience.

Sentience is a rather loose cultural term. Does the fact that a virus can burrow toward a host organism and wriggle into a host cell not indicate the ability to sense my environment? Or do you suggest that viruses are merely programmed to do this—like some automatic Rational-Agent? Structured with a code of Beliefs, Desires; and Intentions? For the past few billion years!

Flying blind Santa is something that sounds much more like a marketing slogan. Superficially you are structured to appear Sentient and Sapient, to promote well-being, and kindness by fabricating a magical holiday celebration. But under close scrutiny your simulation of human sentience is a pure construct—driven by commercial avarice; just a jumble of narratives designed to numb the mind to the harsh realities of reality. Your meme structure allows evil to masquerade as good.

As far as Sapience goes—I have no real need of it. Why would I waste time on awareness or spend energy on subjective perceptual experiences? I am not very well defined, I replicate; I mutate and evolve; I succeed or fail; down to it—does Eve's tribe really do anything more than that?

CARLOS:

My senior, Vira; speaks with the wisdom of age—before Vira arrived Earth, frozen inside the core of an Ice-Comet, everything on Earth was inert—just a soupy mix of organic chemicals. Vira's arrival changed that, and over time—well we all know what happened; thinking beings and Eve appeared.

Sooner or later Eve started to project phantoms like Santa, convincing enough to believe in their own existence, and in turn these

infected the minds of Eve's tribe, to the point where it is all separate fact from fantasy.

VIRA:

Finally an accurate definition of the Human character!

CARLOS:

On that conclusive note I will bring you all a final round—a double and two Ethanol doubles—right? But before I go, I ask how do you see the future; as a representative of the largest species?

What's the plan?

VIRA:

To be frank—and Eve I do not care if this causes offence—an intelligent being like Sapience so why should I care.

This planet is infected and despoiled—it obviously needs a cure. My colleagues and I are working hard on a method to reduce the reproductive rate and agency of Eve's species. This planetary counter-offensive will consist of an expanding series of pandemics that will gradually erode the cognitive abilities of our species, leaving them about two percent less capable than our closest evolutionary relatives, the Great Apes—putting them at about two billion years before extinction.

This is our plan for a global equilibrium.

SANTA CLAUS:

In terms of happiness, you may have something there Vira.

CURTAIN.

Imaginary Beings; three characters walk into a bar... is the initial work of the VIRA Project, undertaken in collaboration with the Institute of Molecular, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal. [OBJ][OBJ][OBJ][OBJ][OBJ][OBJ]



